

# PROSPECT; or, View of the Moral World.

SATURDAY, October 20, 1804.

No. 46

*Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 32.*

## THE GOLDEN CALF, &c.

WHILE Moses was passing away his time upon the mount, under pretence of holding an intimate interview with Jehovah, and getting the testimony inscribed upon the two tables of stone, Aaron, his coadjutor in villainy and deception, formed a plan for swindling the Jewish people out of their property. "And Aaron said unto them, break off the golden ear-rings which are in the ears of your wives, of your daughters, and bring them unto me." (v. 2.) With these golden ear rings he pretended to form a golden calf, which was afterwards thrown into the fire and burnt up, then ground to powder, then thrown upon the waters, and afterwards given to the Jewish people to drink as a kind of morning dram. What a strange story this is: in all its parts it is mingled with suspicious circumstances and stamped with the most swindling hypocrisy. How did they melt this gold? Were they acquainted with the principles of chemistry, or did they bring it into a state of fusion by working of a miracle? How did they afterward grind it to powder, and by what means did they gather it up after it was cast into the water? What was the object of making the people drink of this golden liquid? Was it for the purpose of restoring moral or physical sanity, or was it intended as an exhibition of spite and punishment to the Jewish people?—To all these questions superstitious credulity would give various answers; but reason declares the whole to be a fabrication of fraud, falsehood and deception. If the Christian clergy were to exercise their talents in an explanation of the strange matters contained in this chapter, it might perhaps be of great service to their pious followers, and serve to silence the objections of infidels. In the nineteenth verse of this chapter it is

said, that “the anger of Moses waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand and break them. Fine compliment this which Moses paid to his God; especially considering that the latter condescended to come down upon the mount and write for Moses with his own hand! If the people had offended Moses he ought at least so far have restrained his anger, as to have held sacred the workmanship of Jehovah; instead of this he lets out all the irascible passions to which the frailty of man has exposed his existence. It does not appear from this that he had just left the company of the Creator; for if he had he would have shown a more manly, solemn and dignified conduct.

*Theological Enquiries continued.*

This story bears a great similarity to the manner of writing among the ancients, when they endeavored to account for the supposed deformities of nature. Ever incapable of seeing perfection; and unwilling to believe that the supreme being would, at first, make an imperfect work; they were forever manufacturing stories to account for his spoiling the work of his own hands. It is probable therefore that the Jews picked up this fable among the Egyptians, and thinking it would make their history more perfect, inserted it at the beginning.

We shall take no notice of the interpretation and comment upon this fable by the christian writers, such as, that the serpent was not a real serpent, but a bad spirit in the figure of a serpent; that by the transgression of Adam the human race are condemned to everlasting fire, &c. this makes the matter much worse on the part of God, but as it belongs properly to the character of the christian God, which we are not now examining, we must return to the God of the Hebrews; and, passing over the story of the great deluge, and of Noah with his ark looking only to the moral, I ask to what purpose was the old

world destroyed and what good accrued from it. The new world soon grew to be as wicked, as it was possible for the old world to be, and they departed from the worship of Adonai, or the Lord, for upwards of 700 years till it was revived by Abraham. It is said, that Sodom and Gomorah and all the cities of the plain, were destroyed for their wickedness; but nothing is so great a proof of the vices of any particular period, as when great crimes are related and passed over without censure; of such kind is the abomination of two daughters lying with their father;—the ingratitude of Sarah to Hagar and the treacherous villainy of Simeon and Levi in the murder of Hamer and Secham, Gen. 34. So that it does not appear that the moral character of man was at all improved by the destruction of the old world and although he promises never again to destroy the race of man *at once*, he is continually finding reason to cut them off in detail, sometimes hardening their hearts to prevent their obedience and escape from punishment, Exod. 4, 21. And the Lord said unto Moses when thou goest to return to Egypt see that thou do all the wonders which I have put in thine hand—but I will harden his heart that he shall not let the children of Israel go. Would it not have been as easy to have softened the heart of Pharaoh as to have hardened it, when so many innocent people thro'out the land of Egypt were to be sufferers through that hardness of heart.

And when Moses went to return into Egypt according to the command of the Lord to perform the wonders which he put in his hand. It came to pass that by the way in the inn that the Lord met him and sought to kill him, no reason is given why the Lord should seek to kill Moses; however we are left to conjecture that it was on account of his son not being circumcised; for it immediately follows in the next verse “Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at at his feet, and said surely a bloody husband art thou to me so he let him go. It is probable that the amiable daughter of Jethro, could not be persuaded by Moses to

commit so great a cruelty upon her child, while she resided among her own kindred, but no sooner does he get her from home, and on the road to Egypt than he pretends to have seen the Lord, who had threatened to kill him, if the child were not circumcised; and therefore she says, surely a bloody husband art thou to me but if she had directed the sharp stone at the head of Moses, and thereby put an end to his existence the human race would have been under infinite obligations to the daughter of Jethro, and she would have been the saviour of her own nation.

In inflicting the punishment upon the Egyptians it appears more like a wanton exercise of power in the Lord than to bring men to a sense of their duty and consequent reformation, which ought to be the reason of punishing. All classes of society are involved in the affliction; for it is said Exod. 12 &c 29 the Lord smote all the first born in the land of Egypt from the first born of Pharoah that sat on his throne unto the first born of the captive that was in the dungeon and all the first born of cattle. Here we see him again exercising his fury upon the dumb creation as a drunken man in a passion with his wife, vents his rage against the furniture and glasses, such a God would do very well for a bugbear to the ignorant Jews but never can meet with admiration or devotion by enlightened men at the close of the 18th century of the christian æra or at the dawn of the age of reason.

#### FOR THE PROSPECT.

The advocates of revelation, in support of their scheme, talk sometimes of its external evidence—What is meant by this term! How can external evidence either prove or confirm the position, that God has revealed his will to man by a book? To call in the aid of history to shew that what he is said to have revealed is in whole or in part true, is in so far to prove that there was no occasion

for the supposed revelation, and consequently that an unnecessary communication cannot have been made by a being who does nothing in vain—If sacred and profane history, as they are called, happen in some instances to coincide, are we thence to infer that information as to events related in both comes in one case express from God? The miracles attributed to Jesus Christ are supposed to receive confirmation from the circumstance of the Jewish historian, Josephus having alluded to them in his writings.—But Josephus speaking of Jesus says, or has been made to say, “This was the Christ.”—Now if Josephus really said this 'tis evident he was not a Jew but a Christian, and therefore his testimony in the former character passes for nothing; and if it has been foisted into his work by some zealous friend to divine truth, how shall we know that more or all of his Jewish testimony has not been manufactured with equal judgement to serve the same righteous purpose? The value of external evidence is also enforced by the instance of the destruction of Jerusalem, related to have been forced by Jesus—but with reviving the question whether this famous prediction was written before or after the destruction took place, it may be asked why, in respect to matters of much greater notoriety, history should be wholly silent—The flood—The sun, or earth, standing still at the command of Joshua, and the consequently protracted consequent darkness to half the globe.—Herod's massacre of the infants—and the darkness at the crucifixion,—all these are certainly matters of greater public concernment and consternation than the destruction of a city, and could not have been left unnoticed had they taken place, unless indeed it be contended that profound historians have been *pro tanto* inspired to be silent. External evidence, however, as applied to the question of divine revelation or not, can have no operation—so far simply as it may confirm facts of inferior moment it may prove that every thing related in the bible is not false, but it by no means follows that wheat, merely because it may happen to be found among tares, is therefore to be swallowed as the bread of life.

## POETRY.

The following beautiful verses were written in 1783, while the French revolution, uncrimsoned by the sanguinary scenes which have since disgraced it, was yet in its infancy ; and while the heart of every friend to liberty beat high in its favour.

*Verses, by Roscoe.*

Unfold, father Time, thy long records unfold,  
Of noble achievements accomplished of old ;  
When men, by the standard of Liberty led,  
Undauntedly conquer'd, or cheerfully bled.

But know, 'mid the triumphs these moments reveal,  
Their glories shall fade, and their lustre turn pale ;  
Whilst France rises up, and confirms the decree,  
That bids millions rejoice, and a nation be free.

As spring to the fields, or as dew to the flow'r,  
To the earth parch'd with heat as the soft dropping  
show'r

As health to the wretch who lies languid and wan.

Or as rest to the weary--is Freedom to man.  
Where Freedom the light of her countenance gives,  
There only he revels, there only he lives.

Seize then the glad moment, and hail the decree,  
That bids millions rejoice, and a nation be free.

France ! we share in the rapture thy bosom that fills,  
Whilst the spirit of Liberty bounds o'er thy hills ;  
Redundant henceforth may thy purple juice flow,  
Prouder wave thy green woods, and thine olive trees  
grow.

For thy brows may the hand of philosophy twine,  
 Blest emblems, the myrtle, the olive and vine ;  
 And Heav'n thro' all ages, confirm the decree,  
 That tears off thy chains, and bids millions be free !

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*Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.*

Consider, my friend, in what a terrible discussion I am already engaged ; what immense erudition I stand in need of, to recur back to the earliest antiquity ; to examine, to weigh, to confront prophecies, revelations, facts, with all the monuments of faith that have made their appearance in all the countries of the world : to ascertain their time, place, authors and occasions. How great the critical sagacity which is requisite to enable me to distinguish between pieces that are suppositions, and those which are authentic ; to compare objections with their replies, translations with their originals ; to judge of the impartiality of witnesses, of their good sense, of their capacity ; to know if nothing be suppressed or added to their testimony, if nothing be changed, transposed or falsified ; to obviate the contradictions that remain, to judge what weight we ought to ascribe to the silence of our opponents, in regard to facts alledged against them ; to discover whether such allegations were known to them ; whether they did not disdain them too much to make any reply ; whether books were common enough for ours to reach them ; or if we were honest enough to let them have a free circulation omong us ; and to leave their strongest objections in full force.

Again, supposing all these monuments acknowledged to be incontestible, we now proceed to examine the proofs of the mission of their authors : it would be necessary for us to be perfectly acquainted with the laws of chance, and the doctrine of probabilities, to judge what prediction could not be accomplished without a miracle ; to know the genius of the original languages, in order to distinguish what is predictive in these languages, and what is

only figurative. It would be requisite for us to know what facts are agreeable to the established order of nature and what are not so; to be able to say how far an artful man may not fascinate the eyes of the simple, and even astonish the most enlightened spectators; to know of what kind a miracle should be, and the authenticity it ought to bear, not only to claim our belief, but to make it criminal to doubt it; to compare the proofs of false and true miracles, and discover the certain means of distinguishing them; and after all to tell why the Deity should chuse in order to confirm the truth of his word, to make use of means which themselves require so much confirmation, as if he took delight in playing upon the credulity of mankind, and had purposely avoided the direct means to persuade them.

Suppose that the divine Majesty had really condescended to make man the organ of promulgating its sacred will; is it reasonable, is it just to require all mankind to obey the voice of such a minister, without his making himself known to be such? Where is the equity or propriety in furnishing him, for universal credentials, with only a few particular tokens displayed before a handful of obscure person, and of which the rest of mankind know nothing but by heresay? In every country in the world, if we should believe all the prodigies to be true which the common people, and the ignorant, affirm to have seen every fact would be in the right, there would be no more miraculous events than natural ones; and the greatest miracle of all would be to find that no miracles had happened where fanaticism had been persecuted. The supreme being is best displayed by the fixed and unalterable order of nature: if there should happen many exceptions to such general laws, I should no longer know what to think; and, for my own part, I must confess I believe too much in God to believe so many miracles so little worthy of him.

*To be continued.*

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